



Statement from Bishop Sani Ibrahim Azar

Bishop of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan and the Holy Land

Regarding the Jewish Nation-State Law passed by the Knesset on 19 July 2018

On 19 July the Israeli Knesset passed a Basic Law which enshrines Israel as the “national home of the Jewish people” and states that the “right to exercise national self-determination within the State of Israel is unique to the Jewish people”. This action is of deep concern to me as a religious leader in the Holy Land. This new law deliberately excludes the 1.5 million citizens of Israel who identify as Arab Israeli. It also ignores the presence of citizens and residents who are members of other religious groups and the significant contributions they make to Israeli society. In spite of the great diversity present in Israeli society, this law preferences one culture or ethnic group, even downgrading the Arabic language to having only “special status.”

Of even greater concern, however, is the portion of the law which states: “The state views the development of Jewish settlement as a national value and will act to encourage and promote its establishment and consolidation.” It is difficult to understand how the encouragement and promotion of segregated, mono-cultural, mono-religious communities within Israel proper (or within Palestinian territory, in the form of illegal settlements) moves the State of Israel toward a peaceful future. This stated intention to create Jewish-only communities is cause for alarm for all Christian, Muslim, Druze and Bedouin residents, who wish to enjoy the same rights as other Israeli citizens.

As Bishop of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan and the Holy Land, I must call upon the Knesset to rescind this law. It is fundamentally divisive, racist, and destructive. For many years, Israeli leaders have protested when the word “apartheid” has been used to describe the situation in this land. The adoption of this law, however, makes it difficult to argue against this situation having been codified into law. Declaring that Israel is no longer “home” for non-Jews, or for those citizens representing Arab culture, has officially created a sub-class of people in the nation.

I call on the many citizens of Israel and all people of goodwill to voice their objection to this law, and to stand for a future in which all the people in the land will enjoy equal rights, with equal responsibilities.